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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000353

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV AM

SUBJECT: KOCHARIAN'S INNER CIRCLE: ACCESS BUT LIMITED  
INFLUENCE

REF: 03 YEREVAN 2975

Classified By: Ambassador John Ordway for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

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SUMMARY  
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¶11. (c) President Kocharian has a small inner circle with direct access to him and the potential to influence his thinking on foreign policy matters. Within this inner circle are Foreign Minister Oskanian, Minister of Defense Sargsian, Head of State TV Harutyunian, Presidential Chief of Staff Tumanyan, and First Assistant to the President Gevorkian. While these advisors all have essentially unfettered access to the President, it is doubtful that any of them is in a position to influence his decisions: on the contrary, their positions either coincide with his or are derived from his.  
END SUMMARY.

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GEVORGIAN: NOT QUITE AN EMINENCE GRISE?  
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¶12. (c) Armen Gevorgian (born in Yerevan in 1973), First Assistant to the President, is essentially always at Kocharian's side. While his access is unparalleled and some in Yerevan refer to him as an "eminence grise," he does not appear to influence the President so much as serve as a foil for him. Intensely loyal, Gevorgian joined Kocharian's office in 1997, while Kocharian was still Prime Minister, and moved with him to the President's office. From 1990-1997 Gevorgian studied at St. Petersburg's Institute of Public Administration, and holds a Ph.D. in Pedagogy. He recently married a medical student, and speaks excellent Russian as well as some English.

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SARGSIAN: A FINGER IN EVERY PIE  
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¶13. (c) Minister of Defense Serzh Sargsian, long-time confidant and Presidential ally, has close economic ties with many of President Kocharian's interests (reftel). Born in 1954 in Stepanakert, Sargsian shares with Kocharian and his closest confidants the deep conviction that N-K must be protected at all costs. His ties to the military are crucial to Kocharian's power base, and his and the President's beliefs are most likely to coincide.

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HARUTYUNIAN: KEEPING INFORMATION ON TRACK  
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¶14. (c) Head of State TV (and former Presidential Chief of Staff) Aleksan Harutyunian is an intensely loyal, long-time friend of Kocharian. Born in 1965 in Karabakh, his family moved to Yerevan in the early 1970s. Active in Armenia's independence movement, Harutyunian briefly worked in the Presidential Administration in 1992 before being assigned to the Armenian Embassy in Paris. Harutyunian took a position as Karabakh Permanent Representative in Armenia in 1995 before joining Kocharian's staff in 1997, and served as Chief of Staff 1998-2000. In early 2000 Harutyunian was detained for several months in connection with the October 27, 1999 parliamentary shootings, and allegedly tortured in jail. Harutyunian was appointed head of Armenian State TV in January of 2003, following the December 29, 2002 assassination of the previous holder of that position, Tigran Naghdalian.

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TUMANIAN: AN EFFECTIVE GATEKEEPER  
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¶15. (c) Presidential Chief of Staff Artashes Tumanyan, born in 1949, has been active in Armenian politics since 1990. A former deputy speaker of parliament, 1992-1995, Tumanyan headed the Armenian tax inspectorate from 1997-1999. Although Tumanyan is seen as a close friend of Kocharian, and can limit other people's access, he doesn't exert a great deal of influence of his own. Most recently he has been Kocharian's principal interlocutor on matters dealing with

the Lincy Foundation and its extensive infrastructure projects in Armenia. Although he does not have as high a public profile as Serzh Sargsian, he is nonetheless widely known to the public. The Ambassador spent a day in October 2003 travelling with Tumanyan to visit a number of Lincy-funded projects. Tumanyan, who was driving, made occasional stops to speak to villagers--all of whom immediately recognized him and proceeded to engage him on local concerns.

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OSKANIAN: TOES THE PARTY LINE  
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16. (c) Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian, although he appears to have limited influence on the President's thinking, at least can generally be counted on to accurately relay both the content and tone of foreign governments' messages. A former Tufts professor and former U.S. citizen, Oskanian is a savvy interlocutor, with good access to the President, but with only limited influence. Oskanian is fully capable of thinking "outside the box," but cannot always deliver the President when it comes time for a decision. Oskanian, however, has been given more running room on improving relations with Turkey--despite the fact that Kocharian when speaking to us on the subject is decidedly more pessimistic.

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COMMENT  
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17. (c) While all of these men have immediate and liberal access to the President, as the President's Special Advisor for Economics Nercissiantz told us recently, "Kocharian doesn't listen to anyone." Nercissiantz noted that he has found giving Kocharian, an avid reader, thought-provoking English-language books to read is the best way to open the President's mind to new ways of viewing a particular issue.  
ORDWAY